

STATEMENT
OF
SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUE
VICE CHAIRMAN
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE
APRIL 29, 2004 HEARING
ON S. 2301
THE NATIVE AMERICAN FISH AND WILDLIFE
RESOURCES MANAGEMENT ACT OF 2004

The Senate Committee on Indian Affairs meets this morning to receive testimony on S. 2301, a discussion draft bill that was introduced on April 7, 2004, to provide for support for the activities of tribal governments in managing fish and wildlife and gathering resources.

The Native American Fish and Wildlife Resources Management Act of 2004 was developed by Indian tribes and the tribal organizations they charter to provide for the prudent management of fish and wildlife resources, as well as Alaska Native governments and organizations.

The Act builds upon the foundation of earlier measures – some of which have been enacted into law – which are designed to more specifically address the nature of the United States’ trust responsibilities as they relate to the natural resources that are held in trust.

Tribal governments are the principal stewards of the natural resources on tribal

lands.

And for thousands of years before the European contact, tribes also served as the responsible stewards of the natural resources on the millions of acres of land that were under their dominion and control.

There were no shortages of resources in earlier times, because the tribes regulated fishing and hunting and gathering in a manner that would assure the protection and conservation of our precious natural resources.

They harvested only what was necessary for their subsistence and for those with whom they traded.

But then came the massive influx of those who came to settle in America – and with their westward expansion came the clear-cutting of forests, the resulting erosion of land and the introduction of chemicals to foster the growth of agricultural crops that began to affect the quality of water in the streams and rivers and even the ocean, and later, the construction of dams to provide electricity.

All of these developments have had a devastating impact on the fish and wildlife and the habitat that is their home, that Indian tribes and other concerned citizens seek to preserve and protect.

We have been, for many years now, at a critical juncture in maintaining the health and the very survival of the wild species – the list of species that are threatened or endangered continues to grow – and tough economic decisions have to be made.

For instance, today, on the front page of the Washington Post, we read about a

new rule being proposed by the National Marine Fisheries Service, which announces that the Administration will now count hatchery-bred fish when it decides whether stream-bred wild salmon are entitled to protection under the Endangered Species Act.

The bill that is the subject of the testimony the Committee will receive today was largely drafted in Indian country by those who have expertise in the management of fish and wildlife resources.

It is a work in progress, but I think it is important to note that this bill is not intended to, nor will it effect either an expansion or diminishment of tribal rights.

What it is designed to do is provide support for what tribal governments are doing every day with increasingly limited resources to protect fish and wildlife – not only for the domestic consumptive and subsistence uses of their citizens – but protecting these precious resources for all of our nation’s citizens.

In many areas of the country, tribal governments are working with Federal agencies and state governments to develop and implement management schemes that will preserve fish and wildlife resources and foster the healthy growth of fish and wildlife populations.

Each government has the responsibility of managing fish and wildlife resources within their respective jurisdictions, but working together, Federal agencies, and state and tribal governments, are far better equipped to provide protections for fish and wildlife resources that do not honor jurisdictional boundaries as, for instance, when the various species of salmon return from the ocean to their streams of origin to spawn.

So we all must work together, and tribal governments must have the resources to carry on their tradition of responsible stewardship.

And now may I call upon our first panel.